

The Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program FAQs for 2021 Cycle

Entry Process

1. When is this year's deadline?

All entries must be paid for and entered into NRECA's online system no later than **November 20, 2020 (midnight, EST)**.

2. Why should I enter the Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program?

The Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program's objective is to enhance the profession of cooperative communications by showcasing current, leading practices in a variety of forms of media. Sharing leading practices enables the entire network to benefit from the work of stellar communicators.

This awards program provides a unique opportunity to receive recognition for your work as a cooperative communicator. Your entry will not only serve as a testament to the quality and legitimacy of your work but will aid in developing and enhancing your skills as a communicator via feedback from the program's highly qualified panel of judges.

3. Who can submit an entry for our co-op?

An employee of the co-op must enter the submission in the online entry form. Consultants or agencies cannot submit an entry. The Spotlight on Excellence Awards will not accept entries entirely produced, implemented, or submitted by a consultant or agency. Submissions that attempt to conceal this fact run the risk of being disqualified. (Please see *Question 4* below for more information.)

4. I used an agency for part of my work. Is it still eligible for submission?

Agencies can be an integral part of many cooperatives' communications strategies, but the Spotlight on Excellence Awards aim to reward co-op communicators for their work, not agencies' work. Therefore, if you had a consultant or agency involved, a cooperative employee must have regular, ongoing and strategic involvement in the creative, execution and review process with the consultant or agency for it to be eligible. If you are unsure about whether your project meets these requirements, please contact the Spotlight on Excellence Awards administrator at spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop.

5. *My cooperative has a solar/gas/propane/broadband subsidiary. Can I submit work done for them?*

To be eligible for a Spotlight on Excellence Award, work must be created for and submitted by “...NRECA voting members – electric cooperatives, public power districts, G&T cooperatives and service members (including statewide associations) in good standing– may submit original work produced and implemented by their employees or under the direction of their employees. All entries must have been used to promote the mission of the cooperative organization. **Pieces produced for organizations other than electric cooperatives are not eligible.**”

6. *What timeframe does this year’s Spotlight on Excellence awards program cover?*

In general, a project must have been produced and implemented from **December 7, 2019, through November 20, 2020**. The exception is the Best Total Communication Program, which has more specific timelines based on conception and implementation. Entries must be submitted no later than the award cycle coinciding with implementation/evaluation of the program or event. Please consult the Eligibility section in the *Call for Entries* for complete details.

7. *I have entered before but haven’t won. Why should I enter again?*

The pool of submissions is highly competitive, and it often takes several tries to win. Therefore, your current work may score favorably in this upcoming award cycle. You can’t win at all if you don’t submit an entry!

8. *Why am I asked to submit hard copies for some categories?*

During the entry process, we ask for hard copies to be sent for judging in the *Best Annual Report to Members* and *Best Special Publication – large* categories. These hard copies show off the physical aspects of the work better than a digital copy can.

Once winners are determined, we ask for additional hard copies to showcase the winning work to its best advantage at the CONNECT conference. This allows attendees to really see, feel, read and experience these entries in person, although all winning entries are archived at cooperative.com/spotlight.

9. *Who do I contact with questions or comments?*

For questions regarding entries, eligibility, individual categories, etc., contact Carol Crabtree, the Spotlight on Excellence administrator, at spotlightonexcellence@nreca.coop.

For questions regarding payments, contact the Accounts Receivable Department at 703-907-6875 or by email at accountsreceivable@nreca.coop.

For general comments or feedback about the Spotlight on Excellence program contact Alexis Dunnun at alexis.dunnun@nreca.coop.

Online Payment and Entry Form

10. How does the online entry and payment system work?

Go to the [Spotlight on Excellence](#) webpage to pay for each entry you plan to submit. Please note that any changes in payments must be done manually, so it is best to make sure you have everything organized first. Once you pay, you will receive a confirmation of your payment with a link to the online entry form. The form allows you to choose your classification and category and will provide the appropriate fields for your entry. It also allows you to upload photos, videos, audio or other support materials up to a total of 100 MB total. Please combine all support materials into a single PDF for the judges to view if it less than 25 MB.

If your work exceeds the 100 MB limit for uploads, you can submit a URL that leads to PDFs, an online site, or publication instead. You should provide a link to any A/V files rather than uploading the entire file. You will receive confirmation email for each entry that includes a complete copy of your entry form. This serves as a receipt for those who want a hard copy record of their entries.

11. Can I start an online entry and come back to it later?

No, you must complete your entry all at once. Partial entries do not save. We recommend that you print and fill out the [sample entry form](#) prior to beginning the electronic version so that you are prepared for all sections.

12. How do I know what classification my cooperative is?

For the purpose of judging, cooperatives are divided into five classifications, based on the number of meters served, and whether a cooperative is a distribution co-op, or another type as follows:

- Distribution Cooperative: 1-20,000 meters
- Distribution Cooperative: 20,001-50,000 meters
- Distribution Cooperative 50,001-90,000 meters
- Distribution Cooperative: more than 90,000 meters
- Statewide Association, G&T or Service Member

13. What is an “At-Large” category and why are some categories designated At-Large and others not?

At-Large categories in the Spotlight on Excellence Awards are not size dependent. Examples of these categories are: Best News Story, Best Feature Story, Best Column, Best Photo and Best Use of Social Media. Good writing is good writing, regardless of whether you come from a co-op of 1,000 members or 100,000 members. The same is true of good photography, or clever usage of social media. The size of your system and budget do not affect the quality of product.

14. Why are there categories with no winners?

Awards are made based on an absolute scoring system where scores of 90-100 are eligible for a Gold award, and scores of 80-89 are eligible for a Silver award. In any category, if no entry tallies a score greater than 90, no Gold award is given. Likewise, If none are awarded a score of 80-89, then no Silver is awarded, either.

The number of entries received in each classification affects the outcome as well. Some categories receive many entries; others get fewer than twenty. It is possible to have a classification in a category where no co-op submits an entry, and therefore there can be no award given.

15. *Where can I find examples of past winning entries?*

Examples of winning entries from previous years are available for viewing in the [Past Award Winners](#) section of [Cooperative.com](#).

Judges, Scoring Notification and Recognition

16. *Who judges the entries?*

The judges are a mix of faculty from accredited schools of journalism and practicing communications, marketing and graphic design professionals. They represent a varied geographic area and multiple areas of expertise, although all have at least twenty years of experience in their various fields.

17. *When do I get judges' comments back?*

If you request and pay for judges' feedback, you will receive their comments in late June, after the CONNECT Conference.

18. *When do I get notified if I win? When are winners announced?*

Winners are notified via email by no later than the first week of April. A general email announcement goes out to all cooperative communicators after winners have received notice. Winners are also announced at the CONNECT conference in May.

19. *What should winners expect from the Spotlight on Excellence Awards Program?*

You can expect your work to be displayed across a variety of platforms sponsored by the CREC and NRECA. Samples of are displayed at the Spotlight Café at CONNECT each year. We archive all winning entries online and available year-round in the [Past Award Winners](#) section of [Cooperative.com](#), and may use examples in marketing emails throughout the year.

Additionally, winners can expect a commemorative program and will be invited to a Spotlight Winners' Celebration. They may also be invited to speak about their work in the Spotlight on Excellence Award's Spotlight Café and breakout sessions during the CONNECT Conference.

As of 9/28/20